

PSALM 11

I. BIBLICAL TEXT

Psalm 11

For the choir director. A Psalm of David.

1 In the Lord I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, "Flee as a bird to your mountain; 2 for, behold, the wicked bend the bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string to shoot in darkness at the upright in heart. 3 If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" 4 The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. 5 The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates. 6 Upon the wicked He will rain snares; fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup. 7 For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. TYPE OF PSALM

1. 'TRUST' PSALM
 - a. One of about ten 'trust' Psalms in the book
 - b. Expresses confidence in the Lord for delivery
2. SOUNDS ALMOST LIKE A LAMENT PSALM
 - a. Negative tone in **verses 2-3**
 - b. But there is **no petition for help** or **complaint of suffering**

B. AUTHORSHIP

- DAVID—ATTRIBUTED TO HIM IN THE HEADING

C. OCCASION

1. PERSONAL OR NATIONAL CRISIS—NOT DEFINED IN TEXT
2. SUGGESTED POSSIBILITIES
 - a. **Saul's persecution** and pursuit of David—**I Sam 18-27**
 - Problem—David *did* flee—did not stay put—for about ten years!
 - b. **Absalom's rebellion**—**II Sam 15-18**
 - Problem—David *did* flee—to the wilderness—until he reconstituted his army
 - c. Renewed battles with **Philistines**—**II Sam 21**
 1. David's warriors 'swore' they would not let him fight again

II Sam 21:17—*You shall not go out again with us to battle, so that you do not extinguish the lamp of Israel*

2. No evidence either way—whether he stayed in the field or returned to Jerusalem

D. THEMES

1. RESIST TEMPTATION TO ABANDON WHAT GOD CALLS YOU TO DO/FINISH
2. RELY ON THE LORD FOR STRENGTH TO STAND AGAINST WICKEDNESS
3. THE LORD WILL VINDICATE AND REWARD THE UPRIGHT

E. STORY-LINE

1. DECLARATION OF CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD—**v1a**
2. OCCASION FOR DECLARATION—PEOPLE ADVISE DAVID TO FLEE—**v1b**
3. REASON FOR PEOPLE’S ADVICE—**vv2-3**
 - a. Imminent threats/danger—against upright by wicked opponents—**v2**
 - b. Seriousness of threat—endangering very foundations—**v3**
4. BASIS OF CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD—**vv4-7**
 - a. His presence—**v4a**
 - b. His sovereignty—**v4b**
 - c. His omniscience—**v4c**
 - d. His justice—**v5**
 - e. His judgment—**v6**
 - f. His righteousness—**v7a**
5. REWARD FOR UPRIGHT—ADMITTED INTO LORD’S PRESENCE—**7b**

F. OUTLINES

1. PROPER RESPONSE TO BAD ADVICE
 - a. Counsel of despair—**vv1-3**
 - b. Response of faith—**vv4-7**
2. FAITH IN CRISIS
 - a. Fearless faith—standing against opposition—**vv1-3**
 - b. Foundation for faith—in the Lord—**vv4-6**
 - c. Favor shown for faith—His presence—**v7**
3. GOD JUDGES THE WICKED AND REWARDS THE UPRIGHT

- a. Upright response—to temptation and opposition—[vv1-3](#)
- b. Basis of response—God’s dominion and providence—[v4](#)
- c. God’s judgment of the wicked—[vv5-6](#)
- d. God’s reward for the upright—[v7](#)

III. EXPOSITION

No specific direction is given *to the choirmaster* (see Hebrew title of Psa 4). The Masoretic text has only “By David”; two Hebrew manuscripts and the Septuagint have “A psalm by David.”

1 *In the Lord I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, “Flee as a bird to your mountain;*

How can you say?

How dare you even think about saying that to me!

Counsels of unbelief

Unbelief always views the **darkest side** of a problem—[glass half empty]

Not only undercuts faith—and spiritual energy

But also causes us to disobey God—and pursue courses of action that are more injurious

Sometimes—God is calling us to *stay* in the path of danger—so He can deliver us

Example of bad counsel

Peter to Jesus—after Jesus predicted his passion—see [Mt 16:21 ff](#)

Get thee behind me Satan

The **mountain**

Could be—outside Jerusalem in the countryside

Or it could be—fleeing the field of battle—to retreat behind the walls of Mount Zion

The **bird** is used as a figure of the pursued (1 Sam. 26:20; Lam. 3:52;

From a Jewish proverb—not found in other contemporary literature

Mountains of Palestine being rich in caves afforded safe places of refuge from enemies

The image is that of a bird fleeing for its life—followed in verse 2 by that of the hunter

2 *for, behold, the wicked bend the bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string to shoot in darkness at the upright in heart.*

Hard to know which words following are those of David—or those of his advisors

Bending of the bow [process] = stringing the bow, readying it for shooting.

Attaching the string to one end—then stepping on the other end—as the bow is bent

Three-clause parallelism—depicts the process of preparing to attack

Tension mounts in the song—from bending—to making ready—to shoot

The wicked do this in **darkness**

The way of the godly is deceptive—under cover of darkness—under-handed

Bows and arrows may be real—but probably **metaphors** for

Deceptive wickedness of underhanded opponents

Who sling harmful words and false accusations at the king

3 *If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?*”

Word translated “foundations” is rare one—only elsewhere in **Isa. 19:10**.

Prophecy against Egypt—its fall

And the foundations of Egypt will be crushed; all the hired laborers will be grieved in soul

This verse could mean **three things**

In prevailing anarchy—nothing is worth attempting—anything is too risky

More probably—David as mainstay of his people—must save his life at all costs

Foundations here are not persons—but but the laws and ordinances of public justice

If the foundations are destroyed = complete breakdown of law and order in the community

Today—we often hear the same gloomy assessment that was given to David.

- The sky is falling!
- Wickedness is so strong and flourishing!
- The foundations are crumbling!
- All is hopeless!
- The righteous can do nothing to stem the tide!

Two possible expectations from those who say this—*their solutions*:

Either—emphasis on total despair and defeatism

There is *nothing* that can be done!

They expect David to give up—give in—to capitulate

Or—a plea to David to flee for his and their safety

They expect David to save himself—as the very foundation of royal power
So that he can sustain—through earthly power—the social and legal fabric

God sometimes “shakes things”—to rebuild—and make better

So His people will work on building the church

Not focus on maintaining the old scaffolding

Hag 2:6-7a—*For thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea, also and the dry land. I will shake all the nations*

In this process the old Temple might have been destroyed—but the new one is coming!

Hag 2:7b-9—*and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine, declares the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts, and in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.*

***READ HEB 12:25-29**

4 The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord’s throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.

The Lord is in His holy temple

This King is in residence—He is not in flight

Temple = palace—same word in Hebrew

So—‘Lord’ is parallel to the idea of King

If the eternal Lord stays put—so should the earthly King David

Therefore the question in verse 3—can be asked with hope—not despair

Quoting this—in later crisis—Habakkuk emphasizes their awesomeness—and universal application

Hab 2:20—*The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence*

‘Holy’ temple—suggests two things

It is **sanctified**—set apart—solely for Him

Nobody can invade it—desecrate it—or take it away

It is His sanctuary—and in Him we take our refuge!

We are to **worship** Him—who is in His *holy* temple

Ps 5:7—*At your holy temple I will bow in reverence to you.*

The Lord’s throne is in heaven

His *temple* is not an earthly building—but in the heavenly city

His city ‘has foundations’—see **Heb. 11:10**

The Lord **hears** from his heavenly temple

Ps 18:6,9—*In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry for help before him came into His ears . . . He bowed the heavens also, and came down with thick darkness under his feet.*

‘Throne’ is also one of judgment—the Lord **witnesses** and **judges** everything from above

Mic 1:2-3—*Hear, O peoples, all of you; listen O earth and all it contains, and let the Lord god be a witness against you, The Lord from His holy temple. For behold, the Lord is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth.*

His eyes behold; His eyelids test the sons of men

Two parallel statements that emphasize the theme of divine judgment

God does *not* hide his eyes—as might be inferred—from **Ps 10:1**

God does see everything—and holds the ungodly accountable—**Ps 10:14**

His eyelids test

He **sees** and **judges** [tests] in an instant—in the blink of an eye

Nothing is done that escapes his notice—He sees it all so quickly and comprehensively

Our eyes may grow weary and eyelids droop—but His are always active

He never sleeps

Ps 121:4—*Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep*

His eyelids test

‘Test’—as in testing by fire—to purify and strengthen

As in **Jeremiah**—He tests our hearts and minds—not just actions—but also intentions

Jer 11:20—*But, O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the feelings and the heart*

Jer 17:10—*I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.*

Sons of Men

Hebrew expression—which means all people—all humanity.

SUMMARY FOR VERSE 4

Why fear earthly powers and threats from earthly kings

The Lord is present—and does not flee

So we must stay put—continue taking our refuge in Him

The Lord sees all from heaven—is attentive to human affairs

He sees everything—and will judge fairly from His throne—[explained further in next verse]

5 *The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates.*

Repeated for emphasis and further explanation—the Lord judges

The Lord ‘tests’ [judges] *all* humankind

He is equitable—He is fair—His judgment is righteous

He holds all humans to the same level of accountability

He does not give His people a free pass

He tests the righteous—in order to bring out the best from them

Question—if the Lord loves righteousness—hates evil—why does He allow evil to continue/flourish?

David does not give a *detailed* explanation—this is not a full ‘theodicy’

But here David *implies* the fate of evil-doers

They will suffer the wrath of God—who hates evil

David gives the fuller answer in the next verse—the results of God’s judgment

6 *Upon the wicked He will rain snares; fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.*

Explicit statement of judgment against evil-doers

Four word pictures

Rain snares

Fire and brimstone

Burning wind

The portion of their cup

Rain

Implies *abundance*—of punishment

Implies the *source*—rain comes from above—divine punishment will *descend*

Implies *suddenness*—like an unexpected summer storm

Implies *comprehensiveness*—rain covers the whole area—no place for evil to escape to shelter

Rain snares

Masoretic text = ‘traps’

Could mean 'misfortunes'

Could be the same traps—that evil-doers have set for others—**Ps 9:15-16**

Possibly be a scribal change

From another almost identical word = coals

So—it could mean 'rain coals'—'coals of fire and brimstone'—'flaming coals and brimstone'

Fire and brimstone

Brimstone = Sulphur

Allusion to **Gen 19:24**—destruction of Sodom

Sodom = biblical picture that depicts four things

Sudden—final—complete—divine—judgment

Jesus uses this same word picture—to describe end times

Lk 17:28-32—*It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building' but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the son of Man is revealed. On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and like wise the one who is in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot's wife.*

Reiterated in—**II Pe 2:6-9**

Fiery wind

Hot east desert wind in the Middle-east

Scorches everything in its path

See elsewhere

Ps 103:15-16—*As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, and its place acknowledges in no longer*

Reiterated in—**Is 40:6-7**

The portion of their cup

Cup—could imply—God's wrath

Often used in the Bible—for God's judgment

But 'portion of their cup'—probably means

A metaphor for—what is apportioned to a person

One's destiny [good or bad] as determined by God

Whatever is one's lot

Used in numerous biblical passages—such as

Ps 16:5—[good results]—*the Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup*

Ps 75:7-10—[mixed results]—*But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another. For a cup is in the hand of the Lord, and the wine foams; it is well mixed, and he pours out of this; surely all the wicked of the earth must drain and drink down its dregs. But as for me, I will declare it forever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. And all the horns of the wicked He will cut off, but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up.*

7 For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face.

The focal point of the whole Psalm—is the Lord

The psalm ends at it began

Focused on *the Lord*—Whose character is *righteous*

Compare the first and last verses

The first line showed where the believer's safety lies—He is our refuge

The last line shows where his heart should be—our focus is set on Him

To *behold his face*—should be our goal—our heart's desire

Mt 5:8—*blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*

Literally—'behold their faces'

Addresses the *nature* of God Himself

Plural applied to God—as in **Ge 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Is 6:8**

Denotes the fulness of His perfections

And the trinitarian nature of God

The privilege of access

Oriental custom

Only the closest and most loyal friends were given access to the king and his majesty

The ultimate satisfaction

Ps 17:15—*but as for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake*

The highest and ultimate honor—to behold God's face—a sign that we are His

In Christ—His second-coming—we will see Him just as He is—**I Jn 3:2**

In heaven—we will see His face—and his name will be on our foreheads—**Rev 22:4**